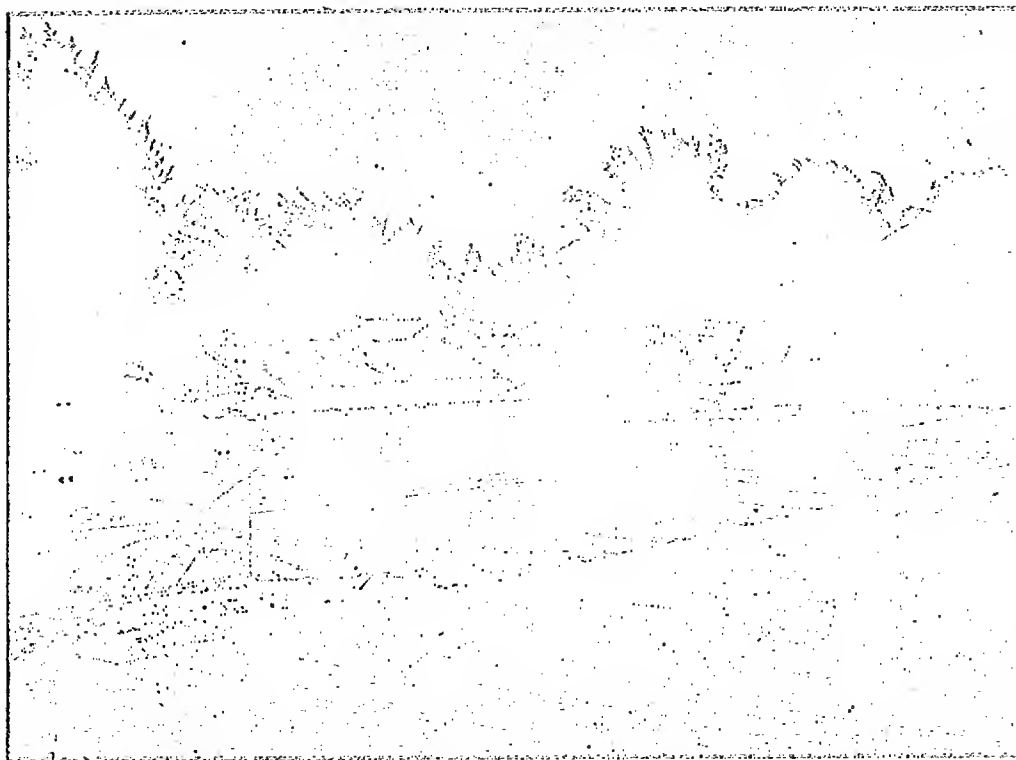


DEC 1970

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Saipan
Peace Corps
Orig. under
Fite

Colonizing Paradise

by Jerry Fite



One morning in early May, 1969, the Department of Interior's Land Management Officer for the Mariana Islands called me in my office on Saipan.

"Jerry," he said, "I wonder if you'd do me a favor."

"Sure, if I can."

"The Distad [District Administrator] asked me to arrange a briefing on

Jerry Fite was a Peace Corps staff member in Micronesia from 1966 to 1969.

Micronesian customs for some visitors. I thought you'd be good to talk about how the local customs affect Americans. You know, some of the do's and don'ts."

"Who's the briefing for?"

"I'm not free to say."

"Where will it be?"

"I can't tell you that, either."

"When will it be?"

"It isn't definite, yet. Probably tomorrow or the next day. I'll call

you a half hour before the meeting and pick you up."

After agreeing to the arrangement, I shuffled through my "hold" box and pulled out a letter dated a few days earlier. The letter contained the response from the Department of Defense to Congressman Lloyd Meeds concerning DOD activity in Micronesia. "The Department has no imminent plans for Micronesia," the letter said.

The day after his phone call, the Land Management Officer came by my office and picked me up in his jeep. With him were the Sheriff of Saipan and the Saipan Superintendent of Elementary Schools, both Micronesians. The Land Management Officer refused to answer any of our questions as we drove to the abandoned Easley Field, now an immense overgrowth cut occasionally by a haphazard maze of old roadways and a con-

crete airstrip. After five minutes of winding through the maze all of us except the driver were completely disoriented. We seemed to be going in circles. Each new turn looked just like the last. After one turn we almost collided with another jeep. It was camouflaged, and an Air Force Major in a camouflaged uniform sat at the wheel, a two-way radio in his hand. The Land Management Officer stopped our jeep, got out, and had a whispered conference with the Major. The Major spoke into the radio. "We're coming in," I heard him say. "There are four of them."

We followed the Major's jeep further into the underbrush. Three or four minutes later we emerged into a small clearing. There was an Air Force base--rows of camouflaged tents in neat order, some more jeeps, water trucks, and assorted military equipment, including a pickup truck full of garbage. The Major led us into an old Japanese communications building. About three dozen Air Force men were seated inside in a large room.

The Major introduced the Land Management Officer, who introduced me and the two Saipanese. Then the Major explained that the men had to have some relaxation, and he was thinking about letting them go into the village. Since he knew there was resentment and suspicion about the military on Saipan, he wanted us to brief the men on how to behave in the most inoffensive manner. The Sheriff was to explain the local laws, the Superintendent to explain customs and taboos from the Micronesian point of view and I from the American point of view.

All three of us began with a statement something like: "A good way to avoid initial suspicion and distrust is to not hide in the underbrush on Easley Field." Then we talked about problems the men might encounter in bars, dating local girls, and so forth. The men were polite, but were bothered that people might not receive them well. All they wanted was a beer or two and a little nooky. They